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FOREIGN SERVICE DESPATCH

FROM : AMEMBASSY, GUATEMALA

643
DESP. NO.

TO : THE DEPARTMENT OF STATE, WASHINGTON.

January 27, 1954

DATE

JAN 27 1954

REF : Emb. Tels 233, 234, 246, 247, 252, January 22-26, 1954

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SUBJECT: Guatemalan Police Rounds Up Suspected Conspirators and Other Opposition Elements.

Starting on January 23, the Guatemalan police began a wave of arrests which has thus far included persons apparently materially involved in plots by Colonel Carlos CASTILLO Armas and General Miguel YDIGORAS Fuentes, the exiled Guatemalan anti-Communist leaders, to overthrow the Arbenz Administration; a group of radio station owners and broadcasters associated with the anti-Communist opposition; and the leaders of the Union de Trabajadores Libres, a small labor association. The Minister of Interior has acknowledged that various persons have been picked up for questioning about subversive activities and some dozen persons are known to be detained with half a dozen others having gone into hiding or taken refuge in foreign missions.

Arrest and Flight of Alleged Plotters: The first of the apparent group of Castillo Armas-Ydigoras conspirators to be arrested was Enrique Trinidad CIVIL Quintana, a major in the Guatemalan Army put on the retired list after he was arrested and released for lack of proof on charges of complicity in Castillo Armas' unsuccessful attempt to seize Guatemala City's Base Militar and La Aurora Airport in November 1950. He was arrested at noon on Thursday, January 23 while driving his children from school in a jeep and the police version is that he fired two shots at them resisting arrest and that they found a .38 mm Smith & Wesson pistol and two hand grenades in the vehicle. His wife immediately applied for a writ of habeas corpus, which was denied by the court on the following day, but magistrates then visited him in his cell, obtaining an oral statement from him that he had not been tortured and that he was not guilty of the charges (unspecified) against him. On Saturday, January 23 within the 48 hour maximum detention incommunicado allowed by the Guatemalan Constitution, he was brought into court and backed on the charge of illegal possession of munitions. He took the occasion to deny to reporters that he was involved in any plot against the government, that he fired at the police arresting him, or that in fact he was in possession of any grenades. He said that he had been interrogated the previous night concerning an anti-government plot involving other persons such as Miguel MENDOZA, a retired Colonel, but he had not admitted knowledge of such a plot.

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Colonel Mendoza is, meanwhile understood to have gone into hiding. In 1945 he was for a few months the first Undersecretary of Defense to serve under Colonel Arbenz when he was Minister of Defense in the Arévalo Administration, and he was later in that year briefly Director of the Guardia Civil, the national police. He soon broke with the regime, ran for President against Arbenz in 1950, and has been mentioned as a participant in numerous anti-government plots in the past eight years.

On Friday, January 22, the day following Major Oliva's arrest, police entered the home of Miguel CAMACHO Labé, an anti-Communist member of the Guatemala City Municipal Council who is understood by the Nicaraguan Ambassador to have been Castillo Armas' personal representative in Guatemala. Not finding Camacho, they searched the house, removing photographs of him and bundles which neighbors believed to have contained newspapers. Camacho succeeded in making his way to the Salvadoran Embassy which accepted him as a political refugee and obtained a safe-conduct for him to leave the country from the Salvadoran Embassy.

On Saturday police arrested Gabriel FERNANDEZ Giovanetti, Camacho's nephew and a local businessman (part owner of the España shirt factory). Fernandez is also a private pilot and the Nicaraguan Ambassador understands that he was to have flown José Luis ARENAS Barrera, Deputy of the Partido Unificación Anticomunista (PUA) who was recently in Washington, to visit President SORRIZA in Nicaragua. Arenas has thus far not been implicated in the plot.

On the same day, the police also picked up Saturnino BARRERA, a retired colonel who was reportedly associated with the late Colonel Francisco Javier ARANA, the moderate Chief of the Armed Forces whose assassination opened the way to Arbenz' election with leftist support.

On that Saturday, the 23d, the third day following Oliva's arrest, police arrested Lic. Guillermo DAVILA Córdova, a prominent local attorney. Dávila Córdova had come in the Embassy on the previous Friday, January 18, for the first time to call on Ambassador Pourifoy to whom he identified himself as General Ydigoras Fuentes' personal representative in Guatemala. In a conversation with an Embassy officer to whom Ambassador Pourifoy referred him, Dávila propounded the view that all that was needed to galvanize the anti-Communist opposition was for a leader with the necessary material support to move. He indicated that Ydigoras was the leader, as Castillo Armas' faction was infiltrated by Guatemalan Government agents and hinted that the United States might furnish the necessary material aid. He was told that the U.S. was committed to a policy of non-intervention, that how this applied to Communist penetration would be decided at the Caracas Conference in March, and that meanwhile neither the U.S. nor the

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hemispheric community could choose among the rival anti-Communist leaders as this was an affair for the Guatemalans themselves. Dávila Córdova's name also appeared in La Hora a few hours before his arrest in an editorial embarrassing to him by Clemente MARRUQUIN Rojas who wrote that he did not believe that Castillo Armas or Ydigoras were capable of undertaking a revolution, but that civilians like "Córdova Cerna, Coronado Lira, Carlos Salazar, or Dávila Córdova" could. In subsequent issues of his newspapers, Marruquin Rojas disclaimed any knowledge of Córdova Cerna's involvement in a plot and expressed the hope that his use of Córdova Cerna's name as a hypothetical example had not misled the authorities.

On Monday, January 25, Lic. Luis BELTRANENA Valladares took asylum in the Salvadoran Embassy after the police had been unsuccessfully looking for him for several days. A member of the Guatemala City Municipal Council, he has been a prominent leader of the FUA, especially since the FUA's Secretary General, Luis VALLECASTRO y Arcinena went into exile last October. Beltranena Valladares is understood to have been associated with the Castillo Armas faction in the Guatemalan opposition.

Meanwhile, Carlos GANDARÁ Durán, an anti-Communist opposition figure who years ago helped found El Imparcial, took asylum in the Nicaraguan Embassy.

Another person arrested was Oscar BERGER, Cashier of the Guatemalan Institute of Social Security (IGSS) taken into custody on January 23 when calling at Comacho's residence. However, this was apparently an error (he said he was calling in connection with Sen. de Comacho) and he was released.

The last person reported arrested was Jorge PALACIOS, son-in-law of Colonel Alfredo Castañeda who was exiled for subversive activity during the Arévalo Administration. He was detained on January 25.

The Existence of the Alleged Plot: It is clear that the Arbenz Administration had some inkling of a plot by Castillo Armas and Ydigoras earlier in January, for it will be recalled that President Arbenz called in the Salvadoran Ambassador and told him he knew of plotting against the Guatemalan Government by exiles in El Salvador. (Embassy Telegram 199, Jan. 13, 1954). However, as the arrests were proceeding, the Guatemalan authorities at first denied that any plot existed. Colonel Carlos Enrique OREA, Chief of the Armed Forces, told the press on Saturday, January 23, that he knew of no plot and that everything was normal in the Army. Colonel Rogelio CRUZ War, Director of the Guardia Civil, told reporters on Monday that no one had been arrested for plotting.

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Meanwhile, it was evident that something was afoot, for many of the arrests were made openly on the streets and road blocks were briefly set up on January 22 on the roads approaching Guatemala City.

The independent and pro-Administration papers, despite the official denials, were writing freely of a plot and on Tuesday, the 26th, Augusto CHARNAUD MacDonald, Minister of the Interior, told his press conference that a conspiracy had been uncovered. He said that it was not precisely a "plot" but an attempt by unscrupulous blackmailers to extract money from individuals on the threat that if they did not, accounts would be settled with them when the present government fell. He added that various people were being questioned about subversive activities. Corroborating the Minister's statement, the Guardia Judicial, which functions as a security police, issued a terse, verbal statement acknowledging that "various" persons had been detained in connection with a plot, but giving no details.

That a conspiracy of some sort was actually uncovered appears to be further confirmed by statements made to me by Sr. Aurelio MONTENEGRO, the Nicaraguan Ambassador, who had visited Camacho in the Salvadoran Embassy. He quoted Camacho as saying that his group had been using a certain Isaac DELGADO, a Costa Rican pilot living in Nicaragua, for safehand communication with the Guatemalan exiles abroad when Delgado flew a light plane in and out of the country. Delgado had brought mail in on Monday, January 18, and flew some out on Wednesday, January 20, but Camacho had been tipped off by a source in the National Palace that Delgado had handed over his mail to the authorities and that it had been photostated. It was on the day after Delgado's departure that the first arrest, Major OLIVA's, took place.

Other Arrests: In addition to the persons named above, the police over the past weekend arrested a number of anti-Communist radio and press figures and labor leaders whose connection with the alleged conspiracy, if any, has not been established and who are believed by informed persons here, on the basis of the evidence so far, to have been picked up merely in a further attempt to intimidate the opposition.

Those arrested included Roberto CASTILLO Sinibaldi, Director of Radio Ciro's and President of the Asociación de Radiodifusoras Particulares, the private radio broadcasters' organization; Horacio de CORDOVA, outspoken critic of the Arbenz Administration on his La Hora Anticomunista on Radio Continental; Roberto VIZCAINO Rubio, Director of Radio Continental and José Maria GUZMAN, ex-Director of La Quosición, a vitriolic anti-Communist news sheet. Castillo, arrested on January 23, was released on January 26 after ten radio broadcasters delivered a protest to President Arbenz's office. Cordova and Vizcaino Rubio had pre-

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viously been the subjects of official attempts at intimidation (Embassy Despatches 814, February 14, 1952, and 1285, June 18, 1952), are still in prison though Gurnaud MacDonald said in his press interview that the radio broadcasters were only picked up for questioning and would probably be released.

The leaders of the Union de Trabajadores Libres arrested on January 25 were Ruben VILLATORO, President, Enrique CORONADO, Secretary, Ramiro AGUILAR, Treasurer, and Miguel Angel QUIROVA (Embassy Despatch 564, January 14, 1954). No charge has been filed against them and no conspiratorial connection between them and others arrested has been established, although it is known that they received support from the PUA.

CONCLUSION: From the evidence presently available, it is clear that the Guatemalan police in the past few days have (1) captured persons materially involved in the subversive activities on behalf of Castillo Armas and Ydigoras, although it is uncertain just how much information on these activities they have been or will be able to extract from the prisoners, (2) partially eliminated the internal leadership of the Castillo Armas and Ydigoras organizations and struck a further blow at the PUA, and (3) again served notice that news broadcasters and others criticizing the regime are in danger from the authorities. These accomplishments cannot fail but to damage the opposition to President Arbenz and make their task more difficult. How they will meet this new difficulty remains to be seen.

William L. Krieg
Chargé d'Affaires a.i.

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